

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 AID-20 DRC-01 CU-04 EB-11 /161 W

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R 110258Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9671

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 13711

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, RP

SUBJECT: MARCOS AND HIS CONSTITUTION

REFS: AM MANILA A-315, NOV. 19, 1973

B. MANILA A-301, NOV. 9, 1973

C. MANILA 13141, NOV. 23, 1973

D. MANILA 12805, NOV. 14, 1973

E. MANILA 12650, NOV. 9, 1973

1. AS PRESIDENT MARCOS APPROACHES THE DECEMBER 30 DEADLINE WHICH MARKS THE END OF THE FOUR-YEAR TERM OF OFFICE TO WHICH HE WAS ELECTED UNDER THE 1935 CONSTITUTION, HE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY JITTERY. AS REPORTED IN REFTELS AND AIRGRAMS, HE HAS MADE SEVERAL
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RATHER DESPERATE ATTEMPTS TO JUSTIFY THE LEGITIMACY OF

HIS INDEFINITE TENURE UNDER PROVISIONS OF THE 1973 CONSTITUTION. HOWEVER, CONSTANTLY WORKING AGAINST THESE EFFORTS AT LEGITIMATION IS THE FACT THAT NONE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY FEATURES OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION HAS YET BEEN PUT INTO EFFECT AND MARCOS CONTINUES TO RULE ARBITRARILY, BY DECREE, AND THROUGH THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF MARTIAL LAW.

2. MOREOVER, SINCE HE HAS FAILED TO FLESH OUT THE VARIOUS INSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS OF THE NEW PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM, THE CURRENT SITUATION LEAVES THE COUNTRY WITH NO CLEAR PATTERN TO DISCERN WHAT ITS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP WOULD OR COULD BE IN THE EVENT MARCOS SUDDENLY DISAPPEARS FROM THE SCENE. THERE IS A GENERAL ASSUMPTION THAT THE DEATH OF MARCOS WOULD PRECIPITATE A POWER STRUGGLE AND A PERIOD OF POLITICAL CHAOS.

3. MARCOS HIMSELF IS ACUTELY AWARE OF THESE PROBLEMS AND IS MAKING A SERIOUS EFFORT TO SURMOUNT THEM. THIS EFFORT IS PROCEEDING ON THREE FRONTS:

A. HE IS TAKING SOUNDINGS ABOUT CONVENING SOME SORT OF LEGISLATIVE BODY WHICH WOULD AT LEAST HAVE THE EFFECT OF DEMONSTRATING MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS PRESCRIBED UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION.

B. HE IS SEEKING TO SUFFUSE THE POPULATION WITH ECONOMIC GAINS, PROGRESS, NATIONAL PRIDE, AND OTHER COMFORTS AND CONTENTMENTS TO SUCH A DEGREE THAT IT ACCEPTS THE POLITICAL ANOMALIES AS THE PRICE OF "NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT."

C. HE IS REDOUBLING EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE DISSENTING LEADERSHIP, EITHER BY SEDUCTION (IN THE CASE OF SEVERAL OLIGARCHS) OR BY SUPPRESSION (IN THE CASE OF CHURCH AND STUDENT LEADERS).

4. UNTIL RECENTLY, HIS EFFORTS WERE GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL AND WERE CONDUCTED WITH A CRAFTY, SHREWD, AND CONSUMATELY CONFIDENTIAL

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CONTROLLING HAND. THESE EFFORTS WERE ASSISTED BY A NUMBER OF FAVORABLE FACTORS, SUCH AS THE BOOMING PRICES FOR TRADITIONAL PHILIPPINE EXPORTS, THE RELATIVELY BENIGN WEATHER DURING THE ANNUAL TYPHOON SEASON, THE POPULAR RELIEF TO BE RID OF DISORDER AND CONSEQUENT TOLERANT ACCEPTANCE OF MARTIAL LAW, THE WEAKNESS AND INDECISION OF THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION, AND THE GENERAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE

PRESIDENT'S POLITICAL VIRTUOSITY. DURING THE LAST FEW WEEKS, SOME OF THE CHARM HAS LOST ITS SPARKLE.

5. FIRST, THERE WAS THE UNEXPECTED FIASCO OF THE ATTEMPT TO TRY SENATOR AQUINO. THE FACT THAT AQUINO, WHILE UNDER DETENTION, SUCCESSFULLY DEFIED THE EFFORT OF A MILITARY TRIBUNAL TO BRING HIM TO TRIAL, WAS A SHARP BLOW TO THE IMAGE OF THE PRESIDENT'S AUTHORITY. MOREOVER, THE EPISODE PROVED A CATALYST TO THE POLITICAL COURAGE OF AQUINO'S IMMEDIATE GROUP OF SUPPORTERS, SUCH AS SENATORS SALONGA, TANJA, AND OTHERS.

6. THIS SAME SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE TO MARCOS IS REPORTEDLY CARRYING OVER TO SEVERAL OF THE MEN WHO WOULD BE EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERIM NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESCRIBED UNDER THE TRANSITORY PROVISIONS OF THE 1973 CONSTITUTION. IN THE FIRST TENTATIVE SOUNDINGS HE HAS TAKEN WITH THEM, MARCOS HAS DISCOVERED A PERSISTENT RECALCITRANCE WHICH MAY LEAD HIM TO CONCLUDE THAT THE INVOCATION OF A SUPPOSEDLY "TAME" ASSEMBLY COULD LEAD TO A REPETITION OF THE AQUINO AFFAIR, WITH THE SCOPE OF THE FIASCO ENORMOUSLY ENLARGED. HE MAY, THEREFORE, FIND IT POLITICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO TAKE THE CONTROLLED COURSE TO "LEGITIMACY" WHICH HE WOULD OBVIOUSLY FAVOR.

7. THE SECOND BLOW TO THIS CONTRIVANCE HAD BEEN THE OIL CRISIS. NOT ONLY HAS THIS EVENT CAUSED SEVERE SHORTAGES AND A RAPID RISE IN MANY CONTROLLED PRICES, BUT ITS ENDURANCE OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME COULD SERIOUSLY UNDERMINE THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. EVEN WITHOUT THE LATTER DIMENSION, HOWEVER, IT HAS GIVEN FOCUS TO THE COMPLEX ECONOMIC PROBLEMS FACING THE PHILIPPINES TODAY. THE WHOLE PRICE STRUCTURE, VULNERABLE TO INFLATIONARY
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PRESSURES AND WITH INEFFECTIVE CONTROLS, INEFFICIENT SUBSIDIES, AND GROSSLY DISTORTED INCOME DISTRIBUTION, IS FAST BECOMING A MAJOR POLITICAL HANDICAP FOR MARCOS. HIS DEVELOPMENT PLANNERS DISCOURAGE HIM FROM SIGNIFICANT WAGE INCREASES, BUT THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE LOWER INCOME LEVELS, ESPECIALLY IN URBAN AREAS, ARE BEING HARD HIT BY RISING COST OF LIVING.

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8. DISSENT, WHICH HAD BEEN EFFECTIVELY SUPPRESSED, IS BEGINNING TO BECOME A FAVORITE INDOOR SPORT ONCE AGAIN. THE DISSIDENCE AMONG SOME QUARTERS OF THE CLERGY IS WELL REPORTED INTERNATIONALLY. THE STIRRINGS AMONG THE STUDENTS HAVE BEEN ACCELERATED BY REPORTS FROM THAILAND, KOREA, AND GREECE. THE ACTIVITY AMONG WHAT PASSES LOCALLY FOR INTELLECTUALS IS RISING IN DECIBEL COUNT. THE LATEST FILIPINO FREEDOM FIGHTER'S LETTER WAS REPORTEDLY DISTRIBUTED IN 80,000 COPIES AND NEARLY EVERY POLITICALLY SOPHISTICATED PERSON IN THE COUNTRY HAS READ AND SNICKERED AT IT. AND FINALLY, THE MUSLIM DISAFFECTION IN THE SOUTH IS STILL TAKING ITS TOLL IN LIVES AND TREASURE, AND SHOWS NO SIGN OF EARLY SOLUTUON REGARDLESS OF TACTICS AND POLICIES BEING EXPOUNDED.

9. AS A RESULT OF ALL THESE EVENTS, MARCOS AND HIS IMMEDIATE COHORTS ARE UPTIGHT AND REACTING TO EVENTS WITH
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SIGNS OF NERVOUS REFLEX. ARRESTS AMONG THE CLERGY
AND AMONG STUDENT LEADERS HAVE BECOME MORE NUMEROUS IN

DECEMBER. THE RECENT JAILING IN SINGAPORE OF A BRITISH NATIONAL INVOLVED IN AN ANTI- MARCOS ASSASSINATION PLOT HAS REVIVED THE PRESIDENT'S SECURITY CONCERNS. HE HARDLY EVER LEAVES THE PALACE THESE DAYS EXCEPT FOR WATER-SKIING CRUISES ON THE PRESIDENTIAL YACHT. HE SEEMS UNCERTAIN ABOUT HOW TO PROCEED WITH THE POLITICIANS AND UNSURE OF THE WAY IN WHICH HE INTENDS TO HANDLE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HURDLE OF THE DECEMBER 30 DEADLINE.

10. HE HAS BEEN ADEPT IN CONCEALING AND DISGUIISING HIS MOVES ON OTHER OCCASIONS; AND IT MAY YET BE POSSIBLE THAT HE HAS SOME COUP DE THEATRE IN PREPARATION PRIOR TO DECEMBER 30, WHICH WILL ENHANCE HIS INSTITUTIONAL POSITION AND HIS POLITICAL PRESTIGE. IF SO, HE HAS NOT DISCUSSED IT WITH MOST OF THE POLITICAL FIGURES WHO WOULD HAVE TO BE INVOLVED IN IT. FOR THAT REASON AND FOR THE NATURAL ILOCANO CAUTION WHICH CHARACTERIZES THE MAN I SERIOUSLY DOUBT AT THIS STAGE THAT HE INTENDS TO DO ANYTHING OTHER THAN TO LET THE CURRENT SITUATION DRIFT AS THE YEAR TURNS.

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